

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

DAVID HOWES (ed.), *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*. New York: Berg, 2005, x + 421 pp. Index.

*Empire of the Senses* is a volume in the *Sensory Formations Series* published by Berg and edited by David Howes. The series takes as its point of departure the recognition of the senses as the site of not only individual but cultural experience, emphasizing the significance of the senses to social and cultural research. The privileging of textual or discourse analysis in cultural studies and contemporary theory following the linguistic turn means that cultural phenomena are "read" as though they were texts, leaving the sensory and aesthetic dimensions empirically unaddressed and methodologically marginalized. This series is about "coming to our senses" in cultural research.

Ontologically rich and epistemologically textured, *Empire of the Senses* is a collection of twenty-two essays accompanied by a comprehensive introduction to the volume and to each section. The text is fully indexed, which enhances its already accessible organizational format. It concludes with "Fifty Ways to Come to your Senses", a 50-item interdisciplinary bibliography of key works that will be a vital resource for students and research scholars intending to pursue further consideration of the sensual in their studies.

This volume acknowledges the hegemonic influence of the dichotomies of rational and emotional, mind and body, but asserts that we are in the midst of a "sensual revolution" that demands new forms of representation. The role of power and the struggle for dominance is central here, since sensual and social orders stand in a relationship of mutual implication. The privileging of sight and hearing over touch, taste, and smell support, often through scientific discourse, asymmetrical power illustrated by, for instance, gender or global relations. This collection addresses the relationships between culture and science, and culture and biology, which outline the contours of the sensual order. In other words, science is a product of culture and does not occupy an external, objective, or ahistorical position.

The central theme of this collection is *intersensoriality*, which is an understanding of the senses as tied to one another. Borrowing from Michel Serres, *Empire of the Senses* offers the image of a knot to make tangible this active relationship between the senses. That is, our experiences are not

marked by disparate senses of touch, sound, or taste, since we do not experience our senses as though they were divided but in interaction with one another as clusters. While sight occupies a position of privilege in the hierarchy of the senses, intersensoriality gives attention to the interplay of all of the senses, acknowledging the ways in which even sight operates alongside the others, or may be guided by the others. The senses are characterized by their interdependency. In this way, intersensoriality highlights how the whole body is implicated in what otherwise might be artificially designated as isolated senses. In connection with this is the theme of *emplacement*, which recognizes that experience occurs within the complex of *mind-body-environment*. Emplacement demands consideration beyond the level of the individual to those of the cultural and the spatial: from the "ritual atmosphere" of a tea ceremony, to gathering sites in multicultural cities, to the *displacement* of environmental sensitivity.

From foundational and theoretical essays to empirical social histories and ethnographies, this collection offers a wide range of engaging works addressing the sensual. This diverse but complementary collection of key essays will be of significance to scholars of postcolonialism, gender studies, material culture, and everyday life (to mention only a few). The volume is a solid compilation of individual contributions that are strong enough to each stand alone, since they will be of interest to a broad audience in cultural studies. A major scholarly contribution that this anthology offers is Howes' attention to theoretical and methodological concerns relating to the senses in contemporary theory and cultural studies, as he draws out the implications of the contributions singularly and collectively. Howes effectively frames and contextualizes this dynamic collection and raises a number of significant questions relevant to cultural research today.

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